

JOHN A MCCONE
POST OFFICE BOX 1499
PEBBLE BEACH, CALIFORNIA 93953

September 22, 1987

Mr. Raymond L. Garthoff
The Brookings Institution
1775 Massachusetts Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Ray,

Now, in respect to your letter: you appreciate that I do not have my CIA files with me here in California as they remain classified. However, I have conferred with Walter Elder, who was my executive officer, and who has access to my files. He confirmed my feeling that the arrest of Penkovsky in 1962 in Moscow by the Soviets was in no way related to the Soviet missiles in Cuba.

Penkovsky's arrest, and the almost concurrent announcement by President Kennedy, were purely coincidental. It will interest you to know that Penkovsky was under suspicion by the Soviet authorities for some time previous, and for a period of time his reports to us were fragmentary and came at irregular intervals. I think it is safe for you to say (if you are writing on this particular subject) that Penkovsky was in no way involved in the Soviet Cuban missile effort.

Now, with reference to the second question in your letter, I had sharp differences with Sherman Kent, Ray Cline, and others in the agency over the prospect of the Soviets placing short- and intermediate-range missiles in Cuba.

I had pointed out to members of our special group that Cuba was the only piece of Real Estate controlled by the Soviets where short-range missiles could be located and targeted on the United States, but could not under any circumstance reach the Soviet Union.

In August and September of 1962, when we identified a number of ships in transit from the Baltic and the Black Sea to Cuba, I could find no explanation for this activity except to level the judgment that the ships contained missiles.

I noted that prior shipments from Russia to Cuba had transported substantial Soviet personnel, together with an array of guns and tanks and other ordinance equipment.

Also that a substantial number of surface to air missiles had been received in Cuba and were rapidly being placed in strategic locations for operation against our U2 reconnaissance flights. To me there seemed no explanation for the substantial number of ships then en route to Cuba.

My deduction, therefore, was that they were carrying offensive missiles. This, however, was a judgment. There could not have been hard intelligence to support my position, as the ships were still at sea. Their cargoes had not been discharged in Cuba, and our agents had no access to their cargoes, so of course there had been no positive reports of the presence of offensive missiles received by the intelligence authorities. As I say, this was based purely on intuitive deductions, and not supported by any hard intelligence.

Ray Cline, Sherman Kent and others differed sharply with me, and in retrospect their position is understandable, as basic to intelligence training is that one reaches conclusions based upon facts, not intuitive judgments.

Our differences were deep. I explained my position to meetings of the principals in August and September of 1962. No one agreed with me, and I left Washington to go on my wedding trip, but did

so only after meeting personally with President Kennedy to explain my concerns. The President convened an NSC meeting (the day of my departure) and "heard me out." He concluded the meeting by instructing the council to draft a contingency plan of what to do, "Just in case John is right," to use his words.

By the middle of September, I received summary of a SNIE unanimously approved by the Board of National Estimates and the United States Intelligence Board, restating the position held by many that there was no hard evidence to the effect that offensive missiles actually had been placed in Cuba.

Of course, this was correct, as the cargoes had not yet been discharged. The missiles later were clearly observed by our U2 photography and their existence supported by agents reports. At that point the knowledge of the existence of Soviet missiles in Cuba was immediately accepted by the intelligence community.

My differences with my associates in the agency and with other seniors in the administration disappeared. Therefore, the immediate question was, "What should be done about it?" To answer this, President Kennedy organized the so-called "Ex-Comm", or Executive Committee.

In the Ex-Comm deliberations we pursued many alternative courses of action, ranging from presenting the issue to the UN Security Council as advocated by Adlai Stevenson, or striking militarily with air and ground forces, as advocated by Dean Acheson.

The committee reasoned that the UN could (and would) do little, if anything - and that military action would prompt an array of Soviet responses, such as taking over Berlin, and acting violently elsewhere. Also it was noted that military action would "spill quantities of Soviet blood," thus causing a most serious confrontation that probably would escalate into war.

These matters were discussed, and debated, in the committee meetings and with the President himself, and it was decided by him that we should move

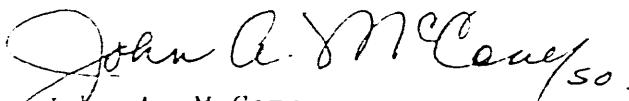
positively, and always providing Kruschev with an opportunity to retreat.

For that reason, military actions including a blockade (in itself an act of war) were temporarily set aside, and a program of a "quarantine" of Cuba was adopted.

This was the first step, but if it was ineffective then military action would follow, and Kruschev was so informed through channels that we knew he respected. When our determination became known to him, the withdrawal of missiles took place almost immediately.

Some students argue that the Soviets never intended to place nuclear warheads in Cuba. I disagree with this position as the facilities for receiving, handling, and storing the nuclear warheads were complete and elaborate, thus evidencing every intention of bringing the warheads in, and in my opinion it is probable that they were actually on one of the ships that turned around in mid-ocean and headed back for the Soviet Union.

Yours sincerely,
and with best personal regards,


John A. McCone

JAM/so